

REPOWERING AFTER DISASTER



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CUSTOMER NAME

Grand Traverse Pallet

CONTRACT AMOUNT

\$1.3 million

LOCATION

Ellsworth, Michigan

START DATE

August 2016

COMPLETE DATE

December 2018

SERVICE CATEGORY

Design-Build; Electrical

OVERVIEW

In July 2016, a catastrophic fire tore through Grand Traverse Pallet in Ellsworth, Michigan. There were strokes of luck with the blaze: no one was hurt, and employees were able to pull down a fire door between the north and south ends of the business before evacuating. Still, the fire decimated half of the Grand Traverse Pallet building, leaving the business with the prospect of having to rebuild that part of the premises from scratch.


Prior to the blaze, Grand Traverse Pallet had been split up into two halves: the mill on one side and the assembly plant on the other. The mill side of the business was responsible for cutting wood into pieces of lumber that could be used for pallets. The assembly side was used for putting the pallets together and treating them to remove moisture. Losing the mill side meant that the business could only be partially functional.

Luckily, Windemuller was there to help. At the time of the fire, Grand Traverse Pallet was already one of our existing customers. We responded to their call immediately, hooking the assembly part of the business up to a generator within hours of the inferno. With the power back on, Grand Traverse Pallet was able to take its remaining lumber supply and continue building pallets. The business owner also started sourcing lumber from a third party, to make sure Grand Traverse Pallet could stay operational despite the catastrophic fire. All told, the assembly plant was back up and running less than 24 hours after the fire, and employees only missed a single afternoon of work.



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Still, even with the assembly plant running again, there was a long road back to full operational strength for Grand Traverse Pallet. They contracted Windemuller to conduct a full design-build of the new mill, which essentially demanded a start-from-scratch approach. Grand Traverse Pallet tore down the ruins of the old mill and we brought in our pre-construction department to sketch out a general lighting layout, make power calculations, and determine the size of power system that would be necessary for the new site.

CHALLENGES

One of the big challenges of this project was the location. Grand Traverse Pallet is located in Ellsworth, a small northern Michigan resort town. To power the new building, we needed to deliver a 3,000-amp service to the property—a huge amount of power anywhere, but especially given the area.

The second major challenge involved working with equipment from multiple manufacturers. Between the existing equipment that still remained on the premises and the new equipment we were bringing in for installation, we had to get creative to make sure everything could work together seamlessly.

Finally, we had to be extra conscious of both budget and customer expectations. On the one hand, our customer knew exactly what he needed to get his business back up to full speed. On the other hand, the project was a huge undertaking with a big price tag. We had to be cognizant of how we were strategizing to make sure we were delivering the highest value possible for our client.

SOLUTIONS

To solve the power problem, we set up a customer-owned primary and used our utilities group to bring medium voltage power from the road all the way out to the Grand Traverse Pallet site. Once we had a power source, we set up the 2,000-kVa transformer and 1,200-amp MCC that allowed us to get the company's assembly side back up and running. The company continued to run off generator power for the next seven months.

To solve the equipment compatibility issue, we worked with our automation group to write custom programs that could integrate all of the systems. We even put together a telemetry system that could automate many of the company's processes in the future, effectively removing the risk of having workers on the production line. Grand Traverse Pallet wasn't ready to take that leap yet, but they will have the option anytime in the future thanks to Windemuller.

Finally, we worked closely with the client's insurance company for six months, to make sure that Grand Traverse Pallet was recouping as much as possible of what it had lost. Item by item, we worked through the value of the old plant with the insurance provider, ensuring everything matched up with what we were building for the new plant. In the end, we delivered more value to the customer at a fairer price, all thanks to our willingness to go the extra mile and collaborate so closely with the insurance company.

